

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. (Currently Amended) A scanning exposure apparatus comprising:
 - an illumination optical system for illuminating a pattern on a mask using arc-shaped illumination light;
 - a projection optical system for projecting the pattern on the mask illuminated by said illumination optical system onto a plate;
 - a mask stage for scanning the mask;
 - a plate stage for scanning the plate, said scanning exposure apparatus scanning said mask stage and plate stage synchronously relative to said projection optical system;
 - a mask support mechanism for supporting a periphery of the mask; and
 - a mask stage tilt mechanism for arranging the pattern in an area illuminated by the arc-shaped illumination light in an object-surface-side focal plane of said projection optical system, wherein the mask deforms due to its own weight from the peripheral support.
2. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said mask support mechanism supports the mask at least at two sides parallel to and/or perpendicular to a scan direction.
3. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said mask support mechanism supports the mask only at two sides parallel to a scan direction.

4. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said mask stage tilt mechanism tilts the mask relative to the scan direction by tilting a stage stool mounted with the mask.

5. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a projection magnification correction mechanism for correcting a projection magnification in a direction orthogonal to a scan direction.

6. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising a stage control mechanism for synchronizing said mask stage and plate stage at a speed ratio corresponding to a projection magnification of said projection optical system, and for scanning relative to said projection optical system, wherein said stage control mechanism adjusts the speed ratio according to tilts of the mask and plate.

7. (Currently Amended) A scanning exposure apparatus comprising:

- an illumination optical system for illuminating a pattern on a mask using arc-shaped illumination light;
- a projection optical system for projecting the pattern on the mask illuminated by said illumination optical system onto a plate;
- a mask stage for scanning the mask;
- a plate stage for scanning the plate, said scanning exposure apparatus scanning said mask stage and plate stage synchronously relative to said projection optical system;
- a mask support mechanism for supporting a periphery of the mask; and

a plate stage tilt mechanism for arranging a surface of the plate in an object-surface-side focal plane of said projection optical system, which plane images the pattern in an area illuminated by the arc-shaped illumination light, wherein the mask deforms due to its own weight from the peripheral support.

8. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said mask support mechanism supports the mask at least at two sides parallel to and/or perpendicular to a scan direction.

9. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said mask support mechanism supports the mask only at two sides parallel to a scan direction.

10. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said mask stage tilt mechanism tilts the mask relative to the scan direction by tilting a stage stool mounted with the mask.

11. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 7, further comprising a projection magnification correction mechanism for correcting a projection magnification in a direction orthogonal to a scan direction.

12. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 7, further comprising a stage control mechanism for synchronizing said mask stage and plate stage at a speed ratio corresponding to a projection magnification of said projection optical system, and

for scanning relative to said projection optical system, wherein said stage control mechanism adjusts the speed ratio according to tilts of the mask and plate.

13. (Currently Amended) A scanning exposure apparatus comprising:

an illumination optical system for illuminating a pattern on a mask using arc-shaped illumination light;

a projection optical system for projecting the pattern on the mask illuminated by said illumination optical system onto a plate;

a mask stage for scanning the mask;

a plate stage for scanning the plate, said scanning exposure apparatus scanning said mask stage and plate stage synchronously relative to said projection optical system;

a mask support mechanism for supporting a periphery of the mask; and

a mechanism for tilting said mask stage and said plate stage for arranging a surface of the plate in an object-surface-side focal plane of said projection optical system, which plane images the pattern in an area illuminated by the arc-shaped illumination light, wherein the mask deforms due to its own weight from the peripheral support.

14. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said mask support mechanism supports the mask at least at two sides parallel to and/or perpendicular to a scan direction.

15. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said mask support mechanism supports the mask only at two sides parallel to a scan direction.

16. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 13, wherein said mask stage tilt mechanism tilts the mask relative to the scan direction by tilting a stage stool mounted with the mask.

17. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 13, further comprising a projection magnification correction mechanism for correcting a projection magnification in a direction orthogonal to a scan direction.

18. (Original) A scanning exposure apparatus according to claim 13, further comprising a stage control mechanism for synchronizing said mask stage and plate stage at a speed ratio corresponding to a projection magnification of said projection optical system, and for scanning relative to said projection optical system, wherein said stage control mechanism adjusts the speed ratio according to tilts of the mask and plate.

19. (Currently Amended) A scanning exposure method for illuminating a pattern on a mask using arc-shaped illumination light, and for projecting the pattern on the mask illuminated by said illumination optical system onto a plate, the scanning exposure apparatus scanning the mask and plate synchronously relative to a projection optical system, said method comprising the steps of:

exposing a focus-measurement pattern mask;

measuring a focus position of a specific area from light intensity or resolution performance of a focus measurement pattern image on the plate;

interpolating a measurement result linearly and identifying an image plane position;

calculating a tilt angle for tilting the mask and/or plate to arrange a surface of the plate on a focal plane at an image-surface position;

correcting a tilt of a mask stage and/or plate stage based on calculated data;

and

exposing an actual mask.

20. (Original) A scanning exposure method according to claim 19, further comprising, in measuring a focus state of the specific area from the focus measurement pattern, the steps of:

scanning only the focus-measurement pattern mask in a scan direction; and

identifying the image-surface position based on an output from a light quantity detector arranged in a specific exposure area.

21. (Original) A scanning exposure method according to claim 19, further comprising, in measuring the focus state of the specific area from the focus measurement pattern, the steps of:

exposing the focus-measurement pattern mask and a plate that applies a photosensitive material, in a scan direction;

verifying a focus state from a sensitized image on the plate; and

identifying the image-plane position based on verified data.

22. (Currently Amended) A device fabrication method comprising the steps of:
- exposing a device pattern onto a plate using a scanning exposure method; and
 - developing the plate that has been exposed,
- wherein said scanning exposure method illuminates a pattern on a mask using arc-shaped illumination light, and projects the pattern on the mask illuminated by the illumination optical system onto a plate, the scanning exposure apparatus scanning the mask and plate synchronously relative to a projection optical system, said method comprising the steps of:
- (i) exposing a focus-measurement pattern mask;
 - (ii) measuring a focus position of a specific area from light intensity or resolution performance of a focus measurement pattern image on the plate;
 - (iii) interpolating a measurement result linearly and identifying an image plane position;
 - (iv) calculating a tilt angle for tilting the mask and/or plate to arrange a surface of the plate on a focal plane at an image-surface position;
 - (v) correcting a tilt of a mask stage and/or plate stage based on calculated data; and
 - (vi) exposing an actual mask.